

null
Lucia A Keegan 07/18/2006 03:09:33 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS PARIS 04843

SIPDIS
cxparis:
ACTION: PAO
INFO: DCM POL ARS AMB

DISSEMINATION: PAOX
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: A/DCM: JROSENBLATT
DRAFTED: PA:CGORSE; LMARGIOU;
CLEARED: POL:LORDEMANN

VZCZCFRI823
RR RUEHC RUEHBS RUEHBUL
DE RUEHFR #4843/01 1981422
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 171422Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9543
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5782
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0372

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004843

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR; EUR/PPD; SA; SA/PD; DRL, G/IWI, SCA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: Transformation Diplomacy Project: Elected Afghan Women in France

11. SUMMARY: EUR/PPD funding helped Embassy Paris partner with French NGOs and French local and national government sponsors to bring 30 Afghan women parliamentarians to Paris June 12-16, 2006, most of them outside their country for the first time. The parliamentarians addressed high-level and public audiences throughout their visit, witnessed French municipal and parliamentary sessions, and received training from U.S. NGO Vital Voices in coalition building and other aspects of political leadership to help them pursue democratic and economic development in Afghanistan. The program raised French official and public awareness of continued assistance needs in Afghanistan, highlighted the country's progress, underscored U.S.-French cooperation in Afghanistan, and helped build the foundation for future French public and private assistance to Afghanistan. END SUMMARY

12. THE SELECTION: Program organizers originally intended to avoid a difficult selection by inviting all 68 nationally elected women parliamentarians and senators. It required a February vote in the Afghan parliament to allow the members to leave the country unaccompanied. In the end, all anticipated funding was not available, and a selection was made, favoring those with little or no previous overseas travel. To continue the project and to make good on the initial promise, principal organizer MEWA (Mobilization for Elected Women of Afghanistan, also meaning "fruit" in Dari) is planning a second trip for those who did not participate, most likely to a destination outside France.

13. THE PROGRAM: In addition to MEWA and the French-Afghan Chamber of Commerce, the Ile-de-France Regional Council and NGO "Solidarite laique" were major contributors. For five days, the Afghans met with high-level interlocutors at the French Regional Council, National Assembly, Senate, Foreign Ministry, where Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy highlighted Franco-American cooperation in the project, Paris city government, and the Elysee for a meeting with

Mrs. Chirac.

Ambassador Stapleton's reception in their honor was transformed into an on-the-lawn impromptu loya jirga (see Embassy Paris webpage for photos), and USOECD Ambassador Constance Morella organized a lunch meeting. Ambassador Steven E. Steiner, the Department's Acting Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, gave closing remarks at the first day's conference, providing the visitors and conference audience an overview of the many U.S. programs for Afghan Women, including projects carried out under the auspices of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

At several venues, the Afghans attended official sessions, and had the opportunity to follow with questions. They also met business leaders and a number of French NGOs, such as those providing micro-credit programs. NGO Vital Voices provided two days of training in coalition building to help bridge gaps among Afghanistan's factions (well-represented and well-exhibited by the visitors).

14. THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR MESSAGE: Visiting the city of light, lunching with the President of the National Assembly, and standing in the gilded halls of the Foreign Ministry and Elysee Palace must have seemed like a moon landing to the Parliamentarians, as some of them watched carefully to see how one used a knife and fork. Instead of champagne, they generally asked for coke. Yet, these women were anything but intimidated by the silk drapes. On a mission to tell their story, at each venue the parliamentarians, representing diverse regions of Afghanistan, including some of the most remote, vied for the opportunity to speak (often breaking into competing regional and ethnic factions in the process). They spoke of national and local circumstances in Afghanistan and of their needs in security and reconstruction, giving examples of Afghans who still have a 5-hour walk each day to supply their families with water.

At Ambassador Stapleton's reception, seated in a circle under a big chestnut tree, each woman told the ambassador the situation in her district, with some asking him to pass a message to the President. There was striking repetition in the key issues they raised: great poverty, a lack of education and health facilities, lack of roads and clean water, lack of jobs, and especially the security situation. Some of the women expressed concern that most of international aid stays in Kabul and never reaches the countryside or disappears in the budgets of contractors. They complained that since farmers receive inadequate support, there is no incentive to abandon poppy cultivation for alternate crops.

15. MEDIA COVERAGE: The visit received wide television, radio, and print coverage in France. All news LCI television repeatedly ran a story highlighting their sessions at the Regional Council and their visit to the National Assembly. France 2 television ran a brief story showing the Afghan women parliamentarians at the French National Assembly. Agence France Presse wire service covered the conference, and Catholic national daily La Croix devoted its June 13 front page to "Afghan Women Who Are Not Resigned." Finally, CNN International ran a story that aired several times on June 16, highlighting the U.S. Embassy reception.

16. RESULTS: The Afghan parliamentarians left with the satisfaction that they had been heard and with confirmation of the support of the U.S. and French governments and of French NGOs. Excellent media coverage provided a new image of Afghanistan's progress and a counterweight to the more frequent French press stories that focus on the return of the Taliban. The French National assembly has implemented a pairing of French women deputy and Afghan counterparts. Souvenir medals were printed for the Afghans, each carrying the name of the individual French deputy-partner, and French parliamentarians have announced a trip to Afghanistan. The Deauville Women's Conference in October will invite Afghan parliamentarians to address the 800-strong international meeting, likely leading to more engagement in Afghanistan's development. Other results, such as education assistance from NGO Solidarite laique, investment and other commercial cooperation with the women heads of French businesses, especially in the health sector, and further training from U.S. and French NGOs are expected.

This was a pilot project. MEWA will continue its outreach and

training projects, and seek to grow international assistance and cooperation to aid Afghanistan's development. FYI to Brussels: Brussels may be the next destination, as proposed by Belgian Senate Head, Anne-Marie Lizin, Lizin, with whom they met in Paris. For our part at Mission Paris, we hope this pilot project will be a prototype of continued triangulation projects with France in our transformation diplomacy goals. While initially more difficult, similar projects to encourage French state and non-state support for Iraq, for example, will be on our agenda. Post wishes to convey its thanks to EUR, SA, and Embassy Kabul for their support in this project.
Stapleton